

Coach Dalton's TOP 10 Rules to help you succeed in the college recruiting process

Rule 1: Understand the rules

The best way to start the process is to completely understand what the rules are that govern the recruiting process. For instance if you are in a tournament and a coach is there who you've talked to 10 times on the phone they still aren't allowed to talk to you until your team is completely done for the weekend. So if you approach them they have to turn and walk away. Don't be offended by that, or assume that means they want you to start looking elsewhere. They are just ensuring that they don't violate any rules. You can access a great handout identifying the rules at: <http://ftp.nfca.org/forms/recruit.pdf>

Rule #2: Identify Who You Are

The most important thing in finding the right college program for you is understanding "who you are" as it relates to a college environment.

- Are you the kind of girl that gets homesick when you are away from your family?
- Are you the kind of girl that likes to talk to teachers before/after classes, or do you like to just blend into the back row and come/go anonymously?
- Are you the kind of girl that likes to focus on softball and academics 24/7 or do you have other
- interests?
- Are you anxious to start as a freshmen or would you be ok sitting the bench until the Junior starting in your position graduates?

All kinds of things like this need to be answered so that you fully understand the parameters of what schools you are going to be looking at. You might get a free ride to the wrong school and if you are unhappy you'll probably play like you are unhappy and that would make that free ride, the wrong ride.

Rule #3: Don't rule anyone out

The worst thing you can do as you go about the process of searching for a school is to start burning bridges by telling coaches things like "Sorry but your school is just a Division 2 school and I'm only focusing on Division 1 schools." The goal of the process is to find the right school that fits who you are. Until you visit a school, see their facilities, watch their practices, spend time with the coaching staff and players you have no idea what school may be right or wrong for you.

Rule #4: Academics do matter

Even the girl who hits home runs every time up to bat must qualify academically to play ball in college. The worst thing you can do is wait until you are on your last visit to your dream school to find out that you are missing courses that you need to qualify for their school. Start early in the process by checking the NCAA Academic Clearing House site at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net to find out what courses you MUST have in order to qualify as an NCAA Student Athlete. You can also register with them and have your transcripts reviewed and be "qualified" as academically eligible. Once you register you should be sure to include that in any correspondence with schools. That gives the coach important information right up front so that they don't have to worry about investing a lot of time in scouting you only to find out later that they can't get you into their school.

Rule #5: Academics demonstrate who you are

Many coaches look at your transcripts to see the kind of person that you are and whether or not you like to be challenged. If they see that you used 18 PE and Home EC courses to pad your transcript with A's that tells them something. The fact that you took more challenging courses and tried to reach as high as you possibly could but got a B would also tell them something about who you are and the fact that you would rather be challenged than take the easy road. So be sure to use your high school academic career as a way to make the right statement about who you are.

Rule #6: Video's

Coaches are going to want to see a video of your skills. Keep in mind that these are smart people who analyze girls day in and day out. Don't spend hours trying to edit videos from the past 15 years to put together a montage of every great hit you've had in your career and surround that with heartfelt pleas from mom and dad. They want to analyze your form/mechanics/approach to hitting and fielding. So respect their time and let them do that quickly. Just put together a 3 1/2 - 5 minute video that is to the point. For batting just take 10 swings off a Tee or with someone soft tossing. For fielding just field a few balls to each side (backhand) and throw the ball. They don't even need to see where the ball goes so don't worry about having a first basemen. They are looking at form, footwork etc. They don't need to see an entire inning of pitching work. They need to see a couple of pitches from different angles, especially from behind the plate view to see how the ball moves. Don't worry about trying to mass mail DVD's to them. There are lots of recruiting sites now like www.championsportsevents.com and others who enable you to upload your video to their site so that coaches can watch it online. Then you can email the coach and say "Coach So and So if you click on the following link you'll see my 3 1/2 minute skills video." That gives them the knowledge up front of how long it is and gives them the chance to watch it immediately wherever they are and ensures your video doesn't end up in a pile with hundreds of others.

Rule #7: Contact them

Let them know you are interested and why.

Be sure to always include a copy of your teams schedule so that they know where/when to look for you. Understand that they don't know if mom/dad is the one keeping the score books so while your stats might be impressive they don't know how to measure them compared to others, so the skills video is much more important to them. Respect their time and demonstrate that by including as much personal information as you can. "I am looking to be an Astro Physics Major and your school has one of the best programs in the country. I look forward to visiting soon and noticed that Sally Sue is also an Astro Physics Major. If it is possible I'd like to attend class with Sally Sue so that I can see the class rooms and meet the professors I'd be working with on my visit" would mean a lot more than to them than just getting a form letter.

Rule #8: Go visit them

Understand that you are committing 4 years of life in most cases to a serious ball program. You can't do that based on the fact that they have "pretty colors" and a "nice logo." So be sure to seriously check out every program you are interested in. Go up and watch their practices. See how the coaching staff works with the players. Find out what off the field training is done. Find out what academic help is provided for the players. Spend time talking one to one with the coach to see how your personalities mesh.

Rule #9: Your new "momma/papa"

Understand that your prospective softball coach is basically going to be taking on the role of your "momma/papa" for your 4 years because of all of the time you will be together. As such understand that they are not only watching your behavior on the field they are watching for tell tale signs off the field of what that relationship will be like. I've heard more stories than I should have about how girls who had big time programs ready to offer them scholarships but walked away after seeing a girl come off of the field after a loss and throw their bat bag at their mom's and then stomp away talking to someone on their cell phone. Every time you are in public (regardless of what you normally do) you need to start thinking about how your actions towards your parents look to someone who might be standing around. You need to start (if you don't already) treating your parents the way your prospective coaches are going to want to be treated. Are you portraying to coaches watching you between games that you are the kind of player they'd like to have in their program, or are you telling them that you are the kind of kid they'd rather see in someone elses family?

Rule #10: Always, always, always HUSSLE

Just because you don't know that a coach is there to watch you, don't think for a second that they can't take notice of you. They could well be attending a game to watch the stud across town spanking your team 15-0, but end up catching a glimpse of the kind of player you are. You struck out ... bad. Did you stomp back to the dugout and drag the team down with you or did you sprint back to the dugout and immediately start encouraging the next batter. Did you run over to the batter on deck and give her a tip about how to identify her change up? It's the last inning, of the last game and there is no doubt your team is heading home once the last 3 minutes of the game runs out. Do you still sprint out to your position? Do you still try and go the right way with each pitch at bat or are you taking the 8 run home run swing? Be the kind of player that stand outs for doing the things that you love watching college softball for. Never give up. Always hussle. Always encourage. Make it clear to anyone and everyone watching that you are a college ready ball player. Make them notice you because you stand out for your effort and your attitude.